

## Peasants, Photography and Citizenship: An Exercise in Re-Framing Social Imagination in the Polish Lands in the Nineteenth Century

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### Abstract

The article analyzes the relationship between citizenship of peasants and photography in the Polish lands in the nineteenth century, using the perspective of potential history (A. A. Azoulay). The purpose of the article is twofold. The first step is to show how photography supported the process of separating the upper classes from the peasants and prevented villagers from being thought of as (present and future) citizens. The second one demonstrates various attempts to “re-frame” the existing reality, i.e. to reunite in one photographic frame what had previously been separated, which was tantamount to imagining a different social order, an order based on cocitizenship. The analyzed material includes mainly photographs and, as contextual sources, paintings from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia.

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In her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay postulates the unlearning of knowledge and activities that support imperial violence. Part of her analysis reflects on the historical narrative related to the development of civil rights, in which the violence is inherent in the creation of the concept of citizenship as an element belonging to the state order, and not a common feature of “cocitizens who care for the common world they share with those others” (Azoulay, 2019, p. 53). The condition for the possibility of the modern concept of citizenship was to distinguish groups of non-citizens: slaves, refugees, or stateless persons. The divisions were and still are based on the imperial “differentiation principle”, which separates citizens from non-citizens, blacks from whites, those authorized to plunder other people’s worlds (e.g. explorers, researchers, art connoisseurs) from those who had no rights. For Azoulay, potentializing imperial history means undermining the divide between citizens and non-citizens, between whites and blacks etc., and in consequence “other options of sharing the world are enlivened as reparations” (Azoulay, 2019, p. 298). The author calls the reparative process an action aimed at undoing those differences and divisions through which imperial violence is reproduced. She writes that:

Potential history is not an alternative account of this already historicized world, but rather a deliberate attempt to pulverize the matrix of history, to disavow what was historicized by making repressed potentialities present again within the fabricated phenomenological field of imperial history, present to be continued. (Azoulay, 2019, p. 286)

Azoulay’s concept of potential history is particularly inspiring for a researcher of the history of photography, as her book contains many examples of visual analysis of such artifacts.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the author emphasizes the parallelism between the history of imperialism and the history of photography. According to Azoulay, the reality-slicing operation of the logic of imperialism, called the differentiation principle above, is the logic of the camera – it works analogously to the movement of the shutter (Azoulay, 2019, p. 24). The camera’s shutter draws three dividing lines. The first, temporal one, separates the moment “before” and “after” taking the picture, analogously to the divisions between “old order” and “new order”, “backwardness” and “progress” in the logic of imperialism. The second, spatial one, separates who is in front of the camera and who operates it, just as imperial geographers separated European centers from overseas colonies working for their development. Finally, the third, concerning the political body, is a line between who collects and appropriates the products of the camera and whose images and work are exploited – just as the imperial

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1 Azoulay is also the author of two books on photography: *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2012) and *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (2015).

system divides people into those with rights and those without them. The “unlearning” of imperialism is tantamount to suspending the operation of the shutter, resisting it, and reversing it (Azoulay, 2019, pp. 27–28). Reversing the movement of the shutter can be understood as “de-framing” the world and re-establishing it in the process of, as I call it, “re-framing”.

In this article, I analyze the inclusion and exclusion of peasants from the sphere of citizenship in the Polish lands in the nineteenth century, using the perspective of potential history. The analyzed material includes mainly photographs and, as contextual sources, paintings of this period. I conduct my research from the perspective of visual studies and cultural history. In the proposed approach, visual sources are part of visual culture understood as “the visual construction of the social, not just the social construction of vision” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 343). Seeing, a crucial practice in the sphere of visibility, is therefore “a cognitive practice undertaken towards and with the help of an image, which is always embedded in the social field, i.e. determined by historical and cultural conditions” (Kurz, 2017, p. 8; cf. Burke, 2006; Mitchell, 2005, pp. 336–356). I use the term “photography” in two senses: as a social representation that reflects or shapes a certain social reality and could support the processes of identity formation, and as a field of cultural practices which consists of the very taking of photos and their social circulation as artifacts.

The purpose of the article is twofold. The first step will be to show how photography supported the process of separating the lords from the peasants and prevented villagers from being thought of as (present and future) citizens. This step will therefore be tantamount to the reconstruction of the movement of the shutter that fragments reality. The second step will be to reverse the movement of the shutter, a gesture of potentializing history. It will demonstrate various attempts to “re-frame” the existing reality, i.e. to reunite in one photographic frame what had previously been separated, which was tantamount to reshaping social imagination: imagining a different social order, an order based on cocitizenship. I use the term social imagination to refer to the ability to envision possible social futures and utopias; it is an expression of what a given community wants for a better life, and thus can lead to social change (cf. Greene, 1995). A deficit of social imagination results in the “imaginary crisis”, the inability to picture a plausible and desirable society a generation or more in the future (Mulgan, 2022). I consider crises of the imagination as a historical phenomenon and inseparable part of the development of societies. In the case of Polish society in the nineteenth century, which I discuss, the crisis of imagination concerned the inability of Polish elites to imagine a civic community that included peasants, and resulted from unprecedented social and economic changes (the abolition of serfdom, the enfranchisement of peasants, and broadly understood democratization of society).

The article will analyze examples of photographs from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia. Its aim is not to provide an exhaustive study of peasant photography and its evolution, but to demonstrate photography as a causative medium shaping social imaginaries. For this reason, the article presents selected case studies, considering

the following analysis as a thought experiment – an exercise in re-framing social imagination.<sup>2</sup>

## Unimaginable Citizenship

Although Azoulay focuses mainly on the logic of imperialism, it can be noticed that the differentiation principle works similarly with regard to the mechanisms of intra-social exclusion. Therefore, the concept of potential history could be useful to think about citizenship in the Polish context. The concept of citizenship is usually linked to the notion of belonging to a well-defined political entity (Heater, 2004). In the case of post-partition Poland, it had to be formed under conditions of statelessness. As Zarycki, Smoczyński, and Warczok argue,

The case of Poland demonstrates that a political community founded by the elite of a stateless nation divided between three imperial administrations was not only able to reconstruct its modern mythology and national identity at the turn of the 20th century but also was able to agree on an autonomous framework of civic belonging, which was parallel to the still existent formal citizenship in the old imperial states of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 270)

According to the authors, citizenship in the case in question has two dimensions. The first is based on traditional criteria such as ethnic, religious, or linguistic identity. The second is based on cultural criteria, less graspable and often used to conceal acts of exclusion (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 275). This naturalized and normative framework, in turn, “largely defines social hierarchies in Poland up to the present day” (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 270). The authors reconstruct changes in models of citizenship over the century. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were two main models of citizenship in the Polish lands (Zarycki et al., 2022). The first one, the landowner citizenship, was based on land property and economic capital: the ideal of the citizen was the landowner (*ziemia- nin*) (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 278). It should be noted that after the abolition of serfdom, it was difficult to imagine a situation where a peasant could be called a “landed citizen” (*obywatel ziemski*), although he could have the same rights and the same number of acres as the landowner. In this model, the landless peasant was an incarnation of the non-citizen. The second and more influential model, that is, the model of the intelligentsia citizenship, referred to the ideal of universal citizenship, regardless of the economic or feudal census (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 279). The ideal citizen was a typical member of the intelligentsia: a well-educated, cultured person with a strong ethos of service to the state. In this case we face a phenomenon called the “culturalization of citizenship”,

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<sup>2</sup> The article is based on the author's doctoral dissertation (in preparation), in which she develops the topics under discussion.

because in this model cultural criteria for full membership in a civic community were crucial (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 279).

I would like to elaborate on this idea: for peasants, joining the group of citizens meant developing an appropriate “modern” habitus, and hence topics such as “people’s education”, “rural hygiene”, or “nationalization of peasants” were popular in Polish public discourse. In the case of the intelligentsia, even those of its representatives who were engaged in social activity in the countryside, one could rather see a tendency to perceive peasants as objects of social policy, unable to decide for themselves. Understood in this way, villagers only aspired to be citizens, waiting for social activists to “raise them” to socially accepted status. The non-citizen in this model was a “boor” (*cham*), originally meaning a peasant, from then on used to describe those who were uncivilized, who did not meet the expectations of “respected citizens” (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 283). The opposition between a “lord” and a “boor” (“*pan*” and “*cham*”) is a key symbolic binary of the Polish civic sphere (Zarycki et al., 2022, p. 282).

Moreover, the possibility of being recognized as citizens in a legal sense was actively denied to peasants. The nobility was unable to imagine a new social order where peasants would have equal rights, and actively refused any attempt to think of a different future. The Manifesto of Połaniec (1794), issued by Tadeusz Kościuszko, gave peasants personal freedom, but was practically ignored (Walicki, 1989). The Constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw (1807), signed by Napoleon, proclaimed the equality of all citizens before the law, but this also remained only on paper. The abolition of serfdom in Galicia (1848) was forced by the Galician Slaughter of 1846. The abolition of serfdom in the Kingdom of Poland (1864, the last in Europe) was caused, among others factors, by the peasant uprisings of 1861. Although both of these events brought changes in the economic sphere, they did not alter anything in the symbolic sphere in the following years: there was no change in perception and peasants were not seen as equal to “citizens”.

The roots of this inertia lied in class prejudices on the one hand and clinging to the national past on the other. The social status quo was maintained not only through delaying legal changes – it was also maintained in the field of art. Generalizing certain tendencies in literature, painting, and the broadly understood Polish culture of the nineteenth century, it can be said that it had a retrospective orientation. As historian Jerzy Jedlicki writes, living with nostalgia was a constitutive feature of Polish spiritual life, and “disputes about the future have never reached the same emotional temperature here as disputes about the past because Poles felt masters and hosts only of their past” (Jedlicki, 1988, p. 278). However, not everyone refused to work for the future. Indeed, the latter decades of the nineteenth century saw increasing attempts to redefine the social imagination.

From the 1870s, there were more and more initiatives undertaken by social activists from the intelligentsia (e.g. Konrad Prószyński) aiming to help peasants build a modern identity. Towards the end of the century, a group of artists-intellectuals called “*chłopomani*” (“peasant-maniacs”) was formed, who tried to dismantle the boundaries of their own class.

They married peasant women and lived in the countryside, as they considered the peasantry to be a force leading the country to independence. Finally, the peasants themselves took part in building a new social order, which was particularly visible at the turn of the century, when peasant movements gained greater political agency and the first peasant political parties were formed. These, as I call them, “prospectivists” created spheres of emerging potentialities on the map of Polish lands. Several of the above examples of re-framing the social imagination showed that it was possible to think of a different social order. Writing about these possibilities is writing potential history.

## Noble's Fantasies, Peasant's Realities

Peasants appeared in Polish paintings in the second half of the eighteenth century (Cękańska-Zborowska, 1969, p. 7). However, their images began to be known to a wider audience on a larger scale in the second half of the nineteenth century, when painting exhibitions began to be organized, the illustrated press appeared, and, above all, photography emerged, thanks to which it was possible to reproduce paintings and, of course, to photograph peasants themselves. Thus, photography had the potential to redefine the imaginary field and broaden the social imagination. Pictures could include the peasantry into the public sphere and had the potential to present villagers as full members of society, as citizens, or, conversely, they could exclude them. Although photography captures people with their individual faces, when thinking about the visual representations of nineteenth-century peasants, in the Polish context no one ever thinks of photos of specific villagers. Rather, it is easy to recall the paintings by artists such as Wojciech Gerson, Józef Chełmoński, or Aleksander Gierymski.



Fig. 1. Jan Feliks Piwarski, *Karczma „Ostatni grosz” – pod Warszawą* [The “Last Penny” Tavern near Warsaw], 1845, public domain.



Fig. 2. Wojciech Gerson, *Droga nad potokiem* [Road by the Stream], 1854, public domain.





Fig. 3. *Kobiety wiejskie* [Village women], photo by M. Olszyński, 1855, National Museum in Warsaw.



Fig. 4. *Zagroda wiejska* [Farmstead], photo by M. Olszyński, 1855, National Museum in Warsaw.

From the end of the eighteenth century, visual topoi began to develop in genre painting and drawing which would remain alive throughout the nineteenth century. These are, among others, the theme of dancing at the inn, drinking at the fair, and praying at a roadside shrine. The paintings in Figures 1 and 2 are representative of the genre painting of this period. However, they were painted before serfdom was abolished in the Kingdom of Poland and before first photos of peasants were taken in the Polish lands. When in 1855 the aspiring photographer Marcin Olszyński photographed peasants for the first time in Polish history (Mossakowska, 2006; Ziętkiewicz, 2012) (see Fig. 3, 4), the critical response was far from enthusiastic. In his review, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, one of the most popular Polish writers at the time, wrote that “whenever man appears in these pictures, his image is strikingly overrealistic”, and that the faces of peasants, due to the accuracy of the photographs, resembled faces of dead bodies (Kraszewski, 1858, p. 4). He suggested that there was no “poetry” in their faces and that it can only be brought out by a painter like the aforementioned Gerson. Kraszewski did not seem to treat peasants as people, but as topics worthy or not worthy of painting. Moreover, in his view, they must necessarily be sublime, because no one wants to look at a peasant as he is, since there is no pleasure in it. Kraszewski’s criticism can be summarized briefly: the peasants in the photographs were unaesthetic, and he would like to see them as “picturesque”. He was not alone in perceiving peasants in these terms. Indeed, picturesqueness, understood as what pleases the eye (Frydryczak, 2013, p. 103), was the main aesthetic category used to portray the village and its inhabitants in the Polish visual sphere from the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth.

The series of photos taken by Olszyński was an experiment in expanding the boundaries of social imagination, an experiment which turned out to be unsuccessful. On the one hand, Olszyński, discouraged by the failure of his venture, abandoned photography (for some time), “because the advantages of his works were not recognized here and not a part of the costs has been returned to him” (Beyer, 1858, as cited in Mossakowska, 2006,

p. 190). On the other hand, the reception of his photographs showed that the nobility preferred to be stuck in the phantasmatic Arcadia, from which the view of the village was obscured by class prejudices. Kraszewski did not want to look at the real faces of peasants because those faces destroyed fantasies about peasant life, perpetuated in broadly understood culture. In the nineteenth century, painting was the main medium supporting the noble's fantasies about the life of rural folk, presenting them as "good-hearted peasants", and their surroundings as a countryside where everyone sings, dances, and drinks vodka. In paintings, the village was usually shown as an isolated island, sometimes even as an exotic foreign land – untouched by urban influence, unaffected by landowners living next to it, and delightful with its "native truth". Painting supported the idea of the countryside as a place where time does not pass. It is striking that motifs "worth painting", such as dancing at the inn, were repeated until the end of the century, despite the fact that the social context had changed significantly over the last hundred years. Topics such as the abolition of serfdom, peasant rebellions, or peasant politics were not reflected in painting.



Fig. 5. Józef Chełmoński, *Orka* [Ploughing], 1896, public domain.

Canvases presenting the work of peasants were rare, especially before the abolition of serfdom, when the subject of peasant labor was a sensitive one. After the abolition, their work was shown through the Romantic lens. The best example of this phenomenon is *Orka* [Ploughing] (see Fig. 5) by Józef Chełmoński, a popular painter from the end of the nineteenth century. At the time the painting was created, the artist ran an estate in Kuklówka in Mazovia, but none of his peasant neighbors wanted to pose as a plowman or lend him oxen (Górska, 1932, p. 51). He had to go to the neighboring estate of his friends, rent animals there and dress up the model accordingly (Górska, 1932, p. 52). The image was therefore far from a photographic representation of reality. It is an apotheosis of



work: a snow-white shirt, the rising sun, a flickering cross over the fields – it depicts life in harmony with nature, according to a divine plan.



Fig. 6. Józef Brandt, *Spotkanie na moście* [Meeting on the Bridge], 1884, public domain.



Fig. 7. Cart drawn by a pair of horses, photo by Józef Grodzicki, Orońsko, 1880–1884, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko.

In the Polish visual sphere there is little representation of violence against peasants or peasant rebellions against the lords. However, sometimes even violence was presented as “picturesque”. One interesting example is the art of painter Józef Brandt, who used photography, especially when painting peasants (Maśłowska, 2018). One of the motifs the artist repeated several times was the image of a landowner's wagon brutally pushing a peasant cart off the road. Images of this kind were not intended to arouse indignation at the behavior of the landowners, but rather nostalgia for the picturesqueness of this world, the times when the nobility enjoyed hunting and balls. The painting *Spotkanie na moście* [Meeting on the Bridge] is one of many examples (see Fig. 6). Interestingly, the peasant cart that can be seen in the picture was almost entirely repainted from a photo taken at Brandt's request by a professional photographer (Maśłowska, 2018, p. 100) (see Fig. 7). We can also find figures of peasants (Polish and Ukrainian) repainted from photographs in many of his works. On the one hand, he probably wanted to paint with photographic accuracy so as not to lose anything of the specificity of villagers. On the other hand, he treated depicting peasant reality as producing a collage, because its exact reflection would not have aroused the nostalgia that his audience was looking for in his paintings. The popularity of Brandt's painting comes as evidence that judgments like those of Kraszewski's quoted above still persisted – painting was still seen as the only appropriate medium to show peasants because it could depict them as “picturesque”. The popularity of depictions of the countryside as a land of reflection or play indicates the impossibility of reorganizing the visual imagination concerning the peasantry. As a way of maintaining their social power, the upper classes had locked the peasantry in a framework that was safe for their own interests.

## Modes of Separation

After the abolition of serfdom in the Kingdom of Poland in 1864, peasants were photographed not in the open air (as Olszyński had done), but in city ateliers, where they were abstracted from the surroundings of their land and carefully posed. Making them match the fantasies of the nobility and the intelligentsia was much easier in the interior of the atelier, which functioned as a kind of laboratory of social imagination.

From the late 1860s, the genre of folk “type” became popular in Polish photography (Sztandara, 2006). It was a variant of the anthropological “type”, which was influenced by the discourses of physiognomy and, later, Darwinism (Edwards, 1990). There were various groups that were typified – in the Polish context, there were pictures of folk or Jewish “types”; in the European context, the types represented, for instance, anthropological others and the so-called “savages”: Japanese, Arab, or African types, etc. The typification stemmed from what was believed to be the “scientific” approach to the human being at the time: the type was to represent a broader racial, ethnic, or regional category. The ethnographic or anthropological type was inherently anonymous; the types were given the general name of the tribe or ethnic group, or the geographical area where they lived. Photographs of “types” were taken in major urban centers and provincial towns throughout the nineteenth century, both by professional photographers for profit and by ethnologists for scientific purposes. This means that they were taken by people “from the outside” of peasant culture, as photography did not become popular in rural areas until the end of the nineteenth century.



Fig. 8. Peasant family from the vicinity of Wilanów, photo by K. Beyer, 1866, polona.pl.



Fig. 9. Peasant with a pitcher of beer, photo by K. Beyer, 1866, National Museum in Warsaw.

In 1866, Karol Beyer created a series of photographs depicting peasants from the Warsaw district (see Fig. 8, 9). The peasants were taken out of the context of their villages and “transplanted” to a specially built hut in the atelier (Jackiewicz, 2012). These photographs were part of the Polish contribution to the All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition in Moscow in 1867, and their aim was to help the designers of the exhibition in creating mannequins in folk costumes from different parts of the Russian Empire (Manikowska, 2019, p. 19). Beyer’s photos were also part of a larger academic project in which the most famous Polish folklorist, Oskar Kolberg, was involved. For this reason, each of the images was described with the name of the posing person, their age and occupation (Manikowska, 2019, p. 21).

Moreover, four of the photographs taken by Beyer in 1866 were presented at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1867. Displayed in the ethnographic section, organized by the Paris Ethnographic Society, they were part of a rich representation of anthropological “objects”: numerous Hottentot Venuses, Indians, Japanese types, Arab types, etc. (Niedzielski, 1867, p. 166). One of Beyer’s images which appeared in Paris was “Peasant with a pitcher of beer” (Fig. 9). His posing was not accidental. Thanks to the side view of the shape of his head, it was possible to compare it anthropometrically with the heads of other “savages” (craniometry was a popular field of science at that time).



Fig. 10. Peasant woman from near Krakow, photo by I. Krieger, 1870s, Ethnographic Museum in Krakow.



Fig. 11. Peasant from Lublin, photo by I. Krieger, 1870s, Ethnographic Museum in Krakow.

Another example are the photographic folk types from the 1870s and 1880s by Ignacy Krieger, a photographer living in Krakow (see Fig. 10, 11). He was persuaded to photograph peasants by Izydor Kopernicki, an anthropologist, who probably used Krieger's photos as teaching aids during his lectures (Plutecka & Garztecki, 1987; Rak, 2013). Among the photographs of Krieger's types, we can find folk types from various regions of Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland, but also Jewish types, Gypsies, or working-class people, such as chimney sweeps (Gaczol & Kwiatkowska, 2017, p. 9). Krieger can be called a producer of folk types, as he took hundreds of photographs which were sold commercially. The images were often colored to emphasize the "picturesqueness" of the folk costume. His models probably did not come to his atelier on their own – he had to "recruit" them (Gaczol & Kwiatkowska, 2017, p. 10). Some of them were probably spotted at the city market, some were photographed by Krieger or his employee "in the field", i.e. in villages near Krakow, and some were persuaded to visit the atelier during various ceremonies attended by peasant delegations from more distant parts of Galicia. We do not know whether he paid his models or gave them a photo as a souvenir. However, he lived off the exploitation of their images, since it was one of the main sources of his income. What is more, the models were rather unaware of the extent to which Krieger derived economic benefits from the reproduction of their image, as their photographs circulated in spheres unknown to the peasants. The images were bought by art collectors, folklorists (the aforementioned Kopernicki had over a hundred of them in his collection), the intelligentsia involved in improving the standard of living in the countryside, and perhaps also the gentry fascinated by the image of a colorful countryside. At that time in Krakow, the aristocracy organized sleigh rides inspired by peasant weddings or dressed up as peasants at balls. Pretending to be a peasant was in vogue (Koprowicz, 2019).

Typification can be read as a political practice. It involved objectifying peasants, treating them as objects of scientific or aesthetic attention, "imprisoning" them in a frame of science or picturesqueness, from which the contexts of social or political changes have been abstracted. Although both in the Kingdom of Poland and in Galicia the abolition of serfdom had taken place before the genre of folk type became popular, and in this period the peasants slowly began to organize themselves into the peasant movement, in these photographs they were presented neither as citizens nor even as human beings equal to the buyers. The practice of photographic typification can be compared to the movement of the shutter described by Azoulay. In the Polish case, the operation of the camera is analogous. The shutter separates "static" folk tradition from "dynamic" urban modernity (temporal aspect); the village from the manor house or the city (spatial aspect); those who do not have social rights, including the right to dispose of their image (non-citizens: peasants), from those who earn money from their portraits and have full rights (citizens: photographers, folklorists) (political body aspect).





Fig. 12. Portrait of anonymous peasants in folk costume from the Krakow region, photo by I. Krieger, 1870s, The National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw.



Fig. 13. Portrait of a couple from the circle of the Ramuŧ family, photo by W. Rzewuski, 1870s, polona.pl, public domain.



Fig. 14. Róża Tarnowska née Branicka in folk costume, photo by W. Rzewuski, 1880, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, public domain.

Photos of peasants and photos of the “lords” functioned separately. There are no photographs in which peasants and representatives of the elite, that is, representatives of the nobility or the intelligentsia, would pose as equals. This can be attributed to fear that photographing oneself with a peasant had a causative function: the image will replace reality, and the social classes will actually align. Even atelier props which were used for pictures emphasized the separateness of the two groups. The juxtaposition of two photos from the same period, in this case two photos from Krakow ateliers taken in the 1870s, reveals the modes of this separation. In the first photograph, a peasant couple in festive garb from the Krakow region poses against a painted landscape, with a birch fence next to it (see Fig. 12). In the second one, a pair of wealthy landowners is presented against a background depicting the interior of a palace, with a richly decorated chair to the side (see Fig. 13). The attempt to swap places worked only in one direction. The nobility and aristocracy could dress up as peasants for costume balls and pose as villagers against backdrops with rural settings (see Fig. 14). However, it was difficult to imagine a peasant posing against the background of a palace interior.

Indeed, a peasant in the palace was a picture of the overthrow of order, the horrors of the past – it could bring to mind the ghosts of peasant uprisings, especially the Galician Slaughter (1846), which had taken place two years before the abolition of serfdom in the province. The destruction of landowners’ mansions during the revolt was commonplace (Kieniewicz, 1951). The rebelling peasants were destroying signs of luxury and noble culture – chandeliers, mirrors, pianos, clocks, furniture, floors, libraries – and, what is more, court office files in which their serf duties were recorded (Kieniewicz, 1951, pp. 219–220). The peasants wanted to



dismantle the social order based on feudal exploitation. Some of them, however, planned to take the place of the landowners: move to the manor and live there (Kieniewicz, 1951, p. 215). Additionally, the image of a peasant in the palace or landowner's mansion is a picture of the inevitably looming future – the social revolution, i.e. the land reform. Debated at the turn of the century, it was eventually introduced decades later, in 1944–1948, when Poland's postwar authorities nationalized the estates owned by landowners and parceled them out among the peasants (Leder, 2014; Wylegała, 2021).

It should be noted that even if nineteenth-century peasants had a mirror at home (still a luxury item in the countryside), they could not see themselves in it entirely. Seeing oneself as someone else in the mirror reflection was a privilege. Consequently, photographing themselves among symbols of the nobility could dangerously broaden their social imagination. They could see themselves, the peasants, as someone who can make social advancement, which was discouraged by the conservative politics of landowners. An excellent description of the imaginative potential of seeing oneself as another is provided by Wiesław Myśliwski in his novel *Pałac* [The Palace] (1970), set after World War II. When the peasant called Owczarz enters the palace, which the inhabitants left in fear of war, one of the first things he encounters is a huge mirror. He is fascinated by his own reflection, and at the same time confirms that he was afraid to look at it in the presence of the lords:

And even something told me to be careful about the one in the mirror [...] about whom almost nothing is known. Despite this, I was filled with hidden joy that I was standing in front of myself. [...] Because I had never looked at myself in the mirror, at the whole me. When I worked here as a messenger, I used to get scared when I accidentally stumbled upon my reflection, and I ran with my heart in my mouth, afraid that someone would see me. Because they could accuse me of a sin. (Myśliwski, 1998, pp. 26–27)

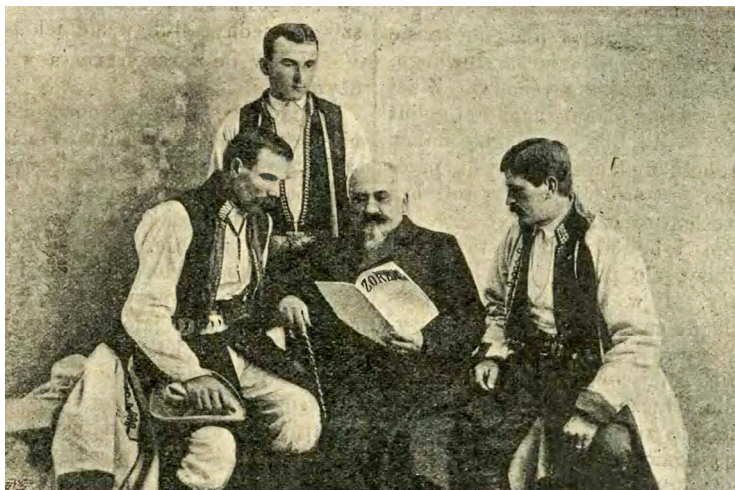


Fig. 15. Gabriel Godlewski with members of the "Jutrzenka" cooperative, *Zorza* 1903, no. 39.

Peasants were prevented from seeing a different social order in photographs, an order in which they are citizens as well. If in exceptional circumstances peasants and noblemen appear together in the frame, e.g. at agricultural exhibitions, the social hierarchy is emphasized by appropriate posing. An example could be the photos from the Peasants' Exhibition in Miechów in 1903 (see Fig. 15). It was the first exhibition in which the organizing committee included a peasant (Jan Tondos), and which was conceived as an event intended mainly for peasants. In a photo taken before the event we can see one of the organizers, Gabriel Godlewski, sitting and reading (probably the program of the exhibition) to peasants. This was an image maintaining paternalistic fantasies. The photograph was reprinted in the peasant press, in the weekly *Zorza* [The Dawn] (1903, p. 927). However, the editor, Maksymilian Miłgaj Malinowski, a member of the intelligentsia, made a retouch – he added the title *Zorza* on the document in the picture, thus showing the peasants as incapable of reading on their own. It was paradoxical as the *Zorza* reported that in 1899 Godlewski had established the agricultural cooperative “Jutrzenka” [Morning Star], and the three farmers in the photo were its members and readers of *Zorza* as well. Moreover, some of the peasant members of the cooperative were active in the peasant movement, and a few years later they were elected to the State Duma (including Mateusz Manterys, who is probably the man on the left in the photo). However, it is worth emphasizing that interpretation of this picture could be ambiguous – creating a cooperative with peasants and posing for photos with them could have been a gesture of social courage by Godlewski, as such initiatives were rare in landowners' circles.

## Re-Framing the Village

A particularly interesting phenomenon related to the separation of the elites from peasants in the visual sphere is the artistic “*chłopomania*” (“peasant-mania”) of the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, Krakow's writers and painters, e.g. Włodzimierz Tetmajer, Stanisław Wyspiański, and Lucjan Rydel, were so fascinated by the countryside that they married peasant women. It was considered a huge scandal because such a marriage did not fit in with the social imagination. In the case of Włodzimierz Tetmajer and his wife Anna Mikołajczykówna, who lived in a village near Krakow, there were even situations where curious residents from the city came to the countryside and looked through the windows of their house, just to see “with their own eyes” how the famous painter could live with a peasant girl (Śliwińska, 2020, p. 285). In the press, the marriage was called “an experiment” and was publicly scrutinized (Śliwińska, 2020, p. 275). Prejudices against peasants were deeply ingrained in the worldview of the upper classes. On the occasion of visits to the city, peasant wives of the artists were called names and the upper-class women they met would even spit at their feet (Śliwińska, 2020, p. 208). When the first daughter of the Tetmajers was born, Julia Tetmajerowa, a new grandmother, described her in a letter as follows: “Włodzio has a daughter. [...]. She's supposed to have her father's

eyes, but she's all peasant. I was at the baptism ceremony, which made me very sad. I felt that this child was not ours!" (Śliwińska, 2020, p. 82).

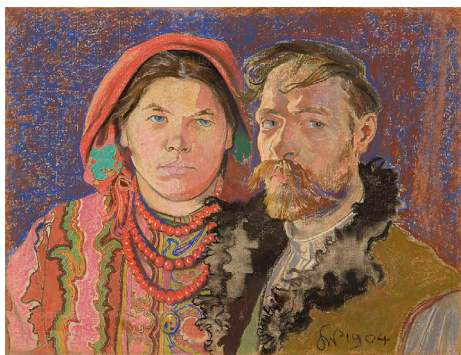


Fig. 16. Stanisław Wyspiański, *Autoportret z żoną* [Self-Portrait with Wife], 1904, public domain.



Fig. 17. Lucjan Rydel with his wife Jadwiga Mikołajczykówna and children in Tonie, 1910, polona.pl, public domain.



Fig. 18. Lucjan Rydel with his wife Jadwiga Mikołajczykówna and children in front of the manor house in Tonie, 1910, Museum of Photography in Krakow.

As artists, "*chłopomani*" also contributed to breaking down the visual isolation of both social groups. Wyspiański did this by means of the famous self-portrait with his wife, Teodora

Pytko (see Fig. 16), where, in a sense, he made himself fit in with folk aesthetics. Lucjan Rydel made the opposite gesture and used photography for this purpose (see Fig. 17, 18). The photos in his collection show the life of his family in the countryside. This village is different from the one known from paintings. The series of photographs in question was taken in front of the manor house in Tonie near Krakow. It is therefore, to some extent, a "lordly" rather than a "peasant" village, which is emphasized by numerous props showing the presence of Rydel's urban habitus: the way he holds a cigar, the eyeglasses on his nose, the stiff collar of his shirt, the newspaper in his hands. Jadwiga Mikołajczykówna, his wife, is invariably depicted wearing a festive folk dress, sometimes embroidering, and sometimes sitting on the grass. On the one hand, she seems to be part of the natural setting in which the peasants were often represented. On the other hand, she is a class element that does not fit the "lordly" aesthetic frame – one can get the impression that someone has pasted her in the photos, that they are a collage. Moreover, the children in those photos do not fit in with the social imagination either. They are social "hybrids", created in the photograph from a mixture of signs belonging to nobility and peasants (e.g. the son has urban toys but wears a peasant cap). I do not want to assess to what extent photographing this world was an emancipatory gesture, and to what extent it was a nostalgic return to the world of "folk truth" that never existed – but it was certainly an exercise of the imagination, an attempt to expand the boundaries of the social (and visual) frame.



Fig. 19. Family of Wojciech Migacz: Marianna and Józef (parents) and their children: Wojciech, Maria, Katarzyna, photos by W. Migacz, 1895, District Museum in Nowy Sącz.

At the same time when Tetmajer married Anna Mikołajczykówna, in another Galician village, Gostwica near Nowy Sącz, Wojciech Migacz, one of the first peasant photographers, began his adventure with the camera. At the end of the nineteenth century, photography slowly, though not without obstacles, spread in rural areas. To be photographed, peasants had to go to an atelier in the nearest town or wait for an itinerant photographer (who was



sometimes a “field” agent of the town atelier). Sometimes there were amateur photographers who could help, for example a priest in a neighboring parish, or a countess living in a manor near the village. Some peasants, like Migacz, learned to take pictures themselves. Photography had the potential to unite the community. Peasant soldiers or emigrants took pictures “as a souvenir” for family members. In addition, whole families were photographed together more and more often (cf. Bartuszek, 2005; Bijak & Garlicka, 1993; Mędrzecki, 1991).

Migacz photographed everything and everyone: himself, his family, neighbors, guests, work, rituals, celebrations, and important political events in the area. About 2,700 of his photos and negatives have survived and are kept in Polish museums (cf. Ambrożewicz, 1985; Bomba, 2019). He also tried to re-frame the image of the village and its inhabitants. One of his first photographic works is a family tableau from 1895 (see Fig. 19). Migacz must have been inspired by a noble’s photographic tableau or an aristocratic family tree. However, there is something wrong with his composition – there are as many as three photos of his mother in it. One can get the impression that he first made a stylized “noble” frame, and then had to fit in the photos of his family members, breaking the very principle of the genre in the process: portraits should not be repeated, and family members should be arranged in the right order: parents in the center (or at the top), and the children next to them (or at the bottom). The very use of a stylized frame, a certain visual genre referring to the noble notion of “family history”, “ancestral pride” and “lineage”, had the function of ennobling the Migacz family. Migacz opposed the landowners’ view of peasants as people immersed in timeless tradition (which is clearly visible in the paintings of this period), and depicted his family in the frame of modern historical time. Interestingly, it was the opposite of Rydel’s gesture – in this case a peasant made himself fit in with the noble’s aesthetics and tried to re-frame it.



Fig. 20. Wojciech Migacz's self-portrait, photo by W. Migacz, 1908, District Museum in Nowy Sącz.

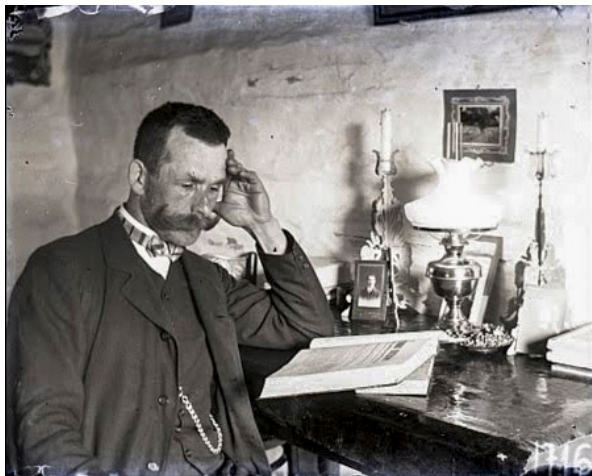


Fig. 21. Wojciech Migacz's self-portrait, photo by W. Migacz, District Museum in Nowy Sącz.



What is more, Migacz eluded being confined within the framework of specific social ideas about peasants. He undermined the coherent – in the eyes of upper class – peasant identity in his numerous photographic self-portraits. It seems that Migacz was aware of aesthetic genres and juggled them deftly. For instance, he photographed himself in traditional folk costume and colored the picture, which brings it closer to Krieger's ethnographic types (see Fig. 20). At the same time, we can also see him in a completely “non-traditional” version: in city clothes, with a camera in his hand, on a bicycle, reading a book, and even sowing grain with a self-constructed machine (see Fig. 21).



Fig. 22. Deputies from the Lublin Governorate, photo by W. Sierociński atelier, *Świat* 1907, no 9.

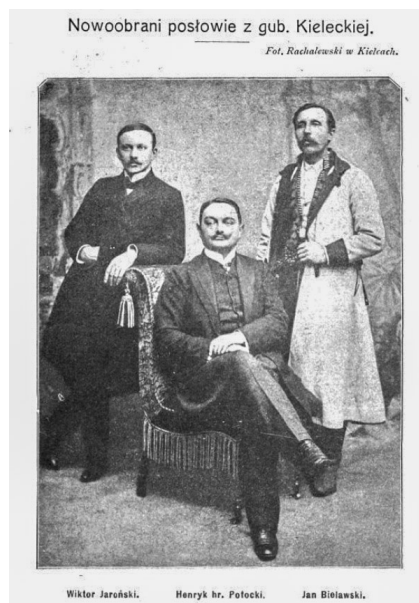


Fig. 23. Deputies from the Kielce Governorate, photo by S. Rachalewski atelier, *Świat* 1907, no 9.

About the time when Migacz played with his image, pictures of peasants appeared in the press in the context of national politics. The press played a large role in popularizing photography. Magazines for peasants explained what photography was and how to learn it; the editors also encouraged the readers to take pictures (Koprowicz, 2021). It was in the pages of newspapers that peasants first saw reproductions of photographs of peasant activists or press readers like themselves. However, photo images of peasants rarely appeared in the press read by landowners and the intelligentsia. In 1907, one of the newspapers for the upper classes, the journal *Świat* [The World], published an article about the second elections to the Duma in the Kingdom of Poland (Vitus, 1907), accompanied by photographs of deputies from individual provinces. It can be suspected that taking a photo in the atelier after winning the election was a confirmation of their new identity. One of the photographs features deputies from the Lublin Governorate:

apart from those of landowner background, there is also a peasant in folk dress, Piotr Żak, an amateur photographer himself (see Fig. 22). The photograph of deputies from the Kielce Governorate is particularly symbolic: we can see Count Henryk Potocki sitting in an armchair, with the lawyer Wiktor Jaroński and the farmer Jan Bielawski standing next to him (the latter was a member of the aforementioned cooperative "Jutrzenka") (see Fig. 23). Although the social hierarchies are reflected in the positions of their bodies (e.g. who is sitting and who is standing), it must be emphasized that the different social worlds are enclosed in one frame. The photo presented the vision of a new world of cocitizenship, which could have been built by the peasantry together with landowners and members of the intelligentsia.

However, was obtaining political rights the same as obtaining the status of citizen in the dominant intellectual model described at the beginning of the article? At the same time as deputies had their photos taken, artists married peasant women, and peasants took their own pictures, it was still popular to sell postcards with folk types and it was still socially acceptable to take anthropometric photos of villagers as part of scientific research. In painting depicting the countryside, the most popular motifs were still peasant dances at the inn, picturesque folk costumes, or nostalgic rural landscapes. In the social imagination, peasants were still mainly perceived as internal "others". It can be said that the inclusion of peasants in citizenship has never been fully accomplished. To this day, the exclusion of villagers from citizenship is sustained by institutions (national museums presenting the history of nobility and intelligentsia vs. ethnographic and regional museums presenting peasant culture) and the production of knowledge (the opposition of history, dealing mainly with national history, vs. ethnography, which focuses on rural customs separated from the political context). Writing potential history requires rethinking these current divisions. Recalling the actions of prospectivists undermines the prevailing national historical narrative, and thus is a step towards reparation of the wrongs of the past in the name of a more inclusive vision of society.

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## Chłopi, fotografia i obywatelstwo. Ćwiczenie z re-kadrowania wyobraźni społecznej na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku

### Abstrakt

W artykule autorka rozważa relacje między obywatelstwem chłopów a fotografią w XIX wieku na ziemiach polskich, wykorzystując perspektywę historii potencjalnej (A. A. Azoulay). Cel artykułu jest dwójaki. Po pierwsze, autorka chce pokazać, w jaki sposób fotografia wspierała proces oddzielania klas wyższych od chłopów i uniemożliwiała postrzeganie mieszkańców wsi jako (obecnych i przyszłych) obywateli. Po drugie, ukazuje różne próby „re-kadrowania” zastanej rzeczywistości, czyli ponownego połączenia w jednym kadrze fotograficznym tego, co wcześniej zostało rozdzielone, które jednocześnie

pociągają za sobą wizję innego porządku społecznego, opartego na współobywatelstwie. Głównym materiałem analizy są fotografie oraz, jako źródło kontekstowe, malarstwo z Królestwa Polskiego i Galicji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** chłopci; fotografia; obywatelstwo; XIX wiek; historia potencjalna; kultura wizualna; historia kultury

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